



BALTIMORE COUNTY *Commission for Women*

Nov. 19, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Call to Order: 6:04 pm

Present: Amy Blank, Audrey Potter, Bailey Susic, Brenda Savoy, Carmen Christiana, Cherie Peay, Helene Waranch, Jennifer Scott, Kara Beverly Nitsa Stakias-Zdziera, Rosalyn Berkowitz, Ruth Howard, Sabrina Jones, Sharon Kehnemui, Sheila Derman, Teresa Messler, Yvette Hicks

Absent: Cecilia Myrick, Cheryl Brooks, Dorothy Foos

1. Secretary Minutes

The October meeting minutes were approved on a voice vote.

2. Treasurer's Report

There were no expenditures in the previous month so the closing balance remained at \$4,425.

3. President's Report

President Howard said that gifts that were voted on to be purchased for the previous two presidents were not included in the budget allocations from the prior month. President Howard recommended spending no more than \$75 on each plaque and revising the budget allocations for the year to \$4,100 from \$3,950. This would leave a balance of \$900 for unreserved funds in the annual \$5,000 budget. The motion was moved, seconded, and approved by acclamation.

President Howard announced two resignations from the commission: District 3 Commissioner Renee McGuirk-Spence resigned from the commission prior to the previous meeting and the vacancy still exists. The other resignation was District 5 Commissioner Frances H. Smith, who was parting from the commission to attend to family matters. She was to submit a resignation letter and talk to her council member about suggested replacements. President Howard suggested that the county executive provide a citation to each commissioner when they resign. Liaison Christiana said that he already gives citations to members on other county commissions and will continue this practice with the women's commission.

President Howard asked for a report on the Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women (MLAW)'s proposed bills for the state's next legislative session, which begins in January. Commissioner Waranch said she attended the annual conference and summarized the legislative items under consideration, including bills on gun background checks; child abuse; marriage as a defense for sexual abuse; pregnancy and prison; public school menstrual products; health equity outcomes; and protections for PPE workers, among others. Commissioner Blank said her committee would provide a fuller report during that portion of the meeting.

President Howard added that The Maryland Commission for Women Hall of fame nominations are due by Nov 30th if the commissioners wanted to share that information with other women's groups.



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President Howard said she requested that the county police chief and state's attorney each attend one of the commission's meetings. She asked the other commissioners to see if they could arrange for the county executive to come speak. Commissioner Peay said she was going to have a member of the Department of Corrections speak to the commission as well.

4. Committee Reports

A. Community Conversations

President Howard said Districts 1 and 5 had cancelled their events due to lack of publicity and therefore lack of participation. She said she wanted to hold a final meeting in January that would combine the districts that hadn't yet held community conversations. She said she will send out a flyer to all of the council member districts requesting that they send it out to constituents and interest groups. Liaison Christiana said that she would also distribute it to district outreach coordinators. They discussed how to get on a mailing list for the liaisons since President Howard never received any mail from the D6 liaison despite requesting that she be added to the list.

District 2 did have a good number of people sign up for their event — about 30 people registered. However, Commissioner Derman expressed disappointment because several people didn't attend because they were unable to connect via the WebEx link. Three commissioners said they also had trouble connecting to the current meeting.

Commissioner Derman said that Council Member Patoka had offered to utilize his resources to host an event. Liaison Christiana said all council members and county officials use the WebEx platform for everything and have not had any issues so to offer a meeting room from a different county source may not make any difference.

Commissioner Derman also said that the links on flyers must be more user-friendly since people were not able to click the link to register.

The discussion then turned toward setting a date for the final community conversation with enough advance time to share it with outreach coordinators. Commissioners suggested the second week of January. Commissioner Jones suggested changing the format because it's now virtual and should be interactive. Commissioner Waranch suggested breakout groups and doing a test run for facilitators and guests who wish to join.

B. Domestic Violence

Commissioner Berkowitz said that she distributed all the domestic violence resource stickers to be placed on pizza boxes. She said there had been an uptick in calls to the hotline but she could not say whether the increase was due to the distribution of the stickers or because of COVID. Domestic violence is significantly increasing as a result of COVID, according to statistics at GBMC, with the White Marsh, Essex, and Dundalk regions reporting the biggest increases.

She said she is waiting on the family violence unit to give her 10,000 resource cards to distribute, hopefully in the next week or two, and that she was planning a December webinar.



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C. Human Trafficking Work Group

Commissioner Berkowitz said she had been prepared to attend the last meeting of the Work Group but it was cancelled because it fell on the evening of the presidential election. Commissioner Savoy said she was also unable to attend because she was an election worker that day. The meeting was postponed until the first Tuesday in December.

D. Public Policy Agenda

Commissioner Blank said that Commissioner Beverly had attended the MLAW event and was going to send an online survey link to commissioners to share their preferences for legislative proposals to support.

Commissioner Beverly said that more than 300 people attended the MLAW conference. Seven bills supported by MLAW passed last year but Gov. Hogan vetoed the gun show loophole. Two additional bills had no action taken on them during the last legislative session.

She highlighted 14 proposals submitted for the 2021 session and asked for commissioners to fill out their preferences in the online survey.

Commissioner Beverly described the following legislative proposals.

- 1) "Best Interest of the Child" – This proposal aims to enable women to claim their children had been abused without fear that the claim will be used against them in child custody issues.
- 2) "Continuing Course of Child Abuse" – This proposal raises ongoing incidents of abuse to the level of first-degree child abuse, which currently only applies to death, disfigurement, or skull fractures, but not the numerous healing fractures, repeated abuse, burns or other injuries often diagnosed by medical professionals as torture.
- 3) "Lifetime Supervision of Sex Offenders" — Currently lifetime supervision is only required for two grades of offender, but not for two categories relating to second degree sexual assault. This proposal requires lifetime supervision to include offenders convicted of certain sexual abuse crimes involving a child over the age of 12.
- 4) "Marriage as a Defense to Sex Crimes" – This proposal eliminates marriage as a defense by repealing the current statute.
- 5) "Prohibition on Sexual Activity by Laws Enforcement Officers" — This proposal makes it a misdemeanor if police officers engage in sex with someone seeking police assistance. The goal is to enable undocumented sex workers to file reports without fear of consequences.
- 6) "Incarcerated Care Act" – This proposal ensures that pregnant incarcerated individuals have access to critical pregnancy related health care and a continuity of care plan after release.
- 7) "Menstrual Hygiene in Public Schools" — To increase attendance and extracurricular participation and to reduce harassment, this proposal requires all public middle and high schools to install menstrual hygiene product dispensers in at least two restrooms in each building, and at least in one restroom in each elementary school by October 2021
- 8) "Smart Start Policy" — This proposal encourages expectant and parenting students to attend school by creating lactation spaces, child care, transportation, and reasonable leave from class for lactation or child care needs.



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9) "Smart Start Longitudinal Study" – This proposal seeks a three-year study by the University of Maryland to understand the challenges for pregnant, expectant, and parenting students (PEPS) by requiring school districts to collect data on their educational outcomes.

10) "Health Equity Resource Communities Act" – This proposal would create geographic areas in the state with poor health outcomes compete for grants, tax incentives, and health care provider loan repayment assistance. This would be paid for with a 1 cent per dollar increase in the state alcoholic beverage tax.

11) "Time to Care Act" – This proposal establishes Family and Medical Leave for employees to take 12 weeks of paid leave from jobs to care for children, themselves, or parents.

12) "Maryland Essential Workers Protection Act" – This proposal would enact procedures to prevent against unfair treatment by employers of employees during COVID and enable employees the right to refuse dangerous work without fear of retaliation.

13) "Self-Direction Act" – This proposal would enable individuals with developmental disabilities to direct their own care and reimburse caregivers fully for managing their care.

14) "Improved Ballot Access Act" – This proposal increases the number of days of early voting, the number of hours that polling places are open, allow more voting by mail, and would create voting centers where people could vote regardless of where the voter lives.

Commissioner Beverly said commissioners can select their top seven preferences and they will be tabulated to determine the commission's priorities. She added that not all legislative proposals have been submitted yet. Commissioner Blank said she wants to connect with each district representative in the Baltimore County delegation to see which bills they are considering.

Commissioner Blank added that she was putting together a spreadsheet to follow all the legislation that has an impact on the commission's vision and mission. She said she can provide weekly updates to interested commissioners to monitor the progression of legislative proposals. She also urged the commission to participate in public policy discussion in a much more vigorous way, including among communities and other organizations where commissioners participate.

Commissioner Blank said that she was encouraging the county executive to speak to the commission at the December meeting and to have a more collaborative discussion with the commission about priorities. Councilwoman Bevins has also committed to coming to the February monthly commission meeting.

E. Women's Health

Commissioner Jones and Commissioner Messler proposed inviting Baltimore County Health Director Gregory Branch or one of his representatives to discuss with commissioners the distribution plans for the COVID vaccine. Maryland currently does not have a plan for prioritizing distribution.

F. Woman of the Year

Commissioner Peay said she spoke with committee members about adding the names of women's organizations to the list that the committee uses to distribute the Women of the Year applications. She said that she didn't know whether all the commissioners want to see the list or if it should just go to Liaison Christiana, but she gave her email address for anyone who wants to add a name to the list. She said that she will arrange to send them to women's groups by November 23rd.



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Commissioner Savoy asked Liaison Christiana whether she was able to get in touch with the women who won the 2020 awards. Liaison Christiana said she asked in October about reaching out to awardees but that was the last communication she had with the commissioner. Commissioner Savoy said that she will reach out to them to see what's best in terms of acknowledging their award status and generating publicity for the winners.

G. Women's Conference 2022

Commissioner Susic said that she had a meeting with the committee last week to nail down the topic for the 2022 conference and to think about the high-level planning process. She and Commissioner Potter talked about who they envision as audience members in order to decide who the speakers will be and a theme or topic. Commissioner Potter comes from an education background and was thinking of the conference as a resource event or fair while Commissioner Susic comes from a business background and was evaluating topics in that arena.

H. Public Relations

Commissioner Susic gave a report about growth of the commission's Facebook page. She said that she had invited all the women from all the Facebook groups she participates in to like the page and many did. She said the page started with 68 likes and had grown by about 470 percent so far in the past two months. Most of the growth is organic but she said the committee spent \$30 of its \$350 budget to promote the page in general. She said engagement on the page is up 4000%.

She asked that commissioners send events of activities that are going on that are relevant to the commission and many items could easily be posted last minute. She said Commissioner Berkowitz's webinars had been posted and participants had been tagged to help build organic following as well. She asked commissioners to friend her on Facebook so that she can share their profiles with the Facebook audience.

I. Prison Reform/Investigation

Commissioner Peay said she had received a formal invitation to participate on the Department of Corrections Advisory Council and the next meeting will be on Wednesday, Dec. 9 at 6:00 pm. She said she will make sure that the commission is represented.

5. New Business

Montgomery County Commission for Women's 3rd Annual Lobby Day will be held on the morning of Wednesday, December 16. The commission was interested in having the Baltimore County Commission for Women cohost.

Commissioner Blank suggested that one evening during the week of December 6, her committee will hold a webinar to review and answer any questions about our priority legislation.

The commission received an inquiry about whether it was interested in presenting an investment boot camp for women, presented in two parts. The event would cover basics like long-term and short-term goal planning, risks, dollar-cost averaging, and how to get started with retirement planning, and understanding fund choices.



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Adjournment 7:13pm

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 17, 2020